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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the failure of the University of Washington to formulate a policy regarding the establishment of a Cultural and Ethnic Diversity (CED) course requirement for undergraduates despite nine years of efforts to do so, tracing the efforts to establish a CED requirement, along with the arguments for and against such a requirement. It first examines the activities of key constituencies in the process through a rational perspective focus, noting the irrational behavior of certain constituencies. The paper then looks at the process from an organizational process perspective, explaining how different groups work for the benefit of the university while at the same time are in total opposition on the CED issue. A normative view of the CED process focuses on the values embodied in the policy actions that different groups chose. The paper concludes that, taken together, these three perspectives substantially illuminate a very complex series of events. (MDM)

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PERSPECTIVES ON A POLICY THAT NEVER WAS:
Trying to Enhance Multiculturalism in a University Setting

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Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the
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In 1988, racist incidents at the University of Washington (UW) led to the perception by many students and some faculty of a need for UW students to become more interculturally sensitive. With the intent of using the curriculum to ensure that students learned more about America's minority groups, a process of formulating a policy regarding the establishment of a Cultural and Ethnic Diversity (CED) course requirement for undergraduate graduation was begun. Ten years later, despite repeated efforts by students and faculty, no such requirement yet exists, nor does it appear likely that a CED Requirement will be enacted in the future.

Understanding the inability of policy makers to finally formulate and enact a policy is essential to adapting the policy-making process successfully to future situations. How could a process that lasted nine years ultimately result in no policy? Does the lack of a CED requirement represent the success or the failure of the policy-making process? What beliefs about the process were held by those most concerned with increasing sensitivity to diversity, that prevented them from anticipating and preparing for the challenges brought by those who saw other concerns as more significant than a CED requirement? In this paper, using multiple perspectives to focus on the process, we will find that mistaken, perhaps naive assumptions about the purely rational nature of the actors and the process, and insufficient consideration of the conflicting power, values and investments of those involved, made the final outcome inevitable.

The Institution and The Players

The University of Washington is a large public research university with some 4,000 teaching and research faculty and a student body of about 35,000. Although set in a culturally diverse urban environment among a generally well-educated population, the UW population has traditionally reflected the less sophisticated, primarily white population of the entire State. Asian Americans increasingly form the largest student minority group, now comprising some 20% of undergraduates; African Americans and Hispanics each make up between 3% and 4%; and Native Americans are 1.1% of undergraduates. Because admission to UW is quite competitive, students tend to be bright, with a history of academic success and extracurricular achievement.

At research universities like UW, promotion and tenure are largely based on contributions to the advancement of knowledge, i.e., on research and publications, rather than on successful teaching; many faculty have very little involvement with undergraduates. Each faculty member has a powerful investment in his own research, and academic freedom is of paramount importance. While faculty may criticize each other's ideas, a fundamental belief is that no one can tell a professor what he may or may not teach in his classroom. Curriculum development is the particular prerogative of faculty members, and there is a great deal of sensitivity to perceived intrusions on academic freedom from outsiders, whether they be administrators, students, or governmental entities. According to Roger L. Geiger (1984),

> A good deal of authority in research universities is vested in academic departments. This is where the expertise necessary for exercising academic judgments resides, and this is where academic values are most strongly felt. In large measure research universities are obliged to defer to their departments in matters pertaining to personnel and subject matter if they wish to retain their most productive and prestigious faculty members.

More specifically, with regard to general education, under which heading a CED requirement would fall, Geiger points out that "most disciplinary faculty have little use for general education courses...If one does not wholeheartedly endorse the premises of these courses...teaching them can be intellectually dishonest. The more closely prescribed the course, the greater the dilemma."

In 1988, college campuses across the nation were experiencing changes brought about by the increasing diversity of students, the increased assertiveness of minority groups as their numbers grew, and the negative response of some majority students who felt threatened by these changes. This campus climate was also to be found at UW. A series of racist incidents, including the writing of the word "nigger" on the door of the Director of the Black Student Commission, prompted action by the student government. The Associated Students of the University of Washington (ASUW) formed a task force on racism, which eventually decided to make curricular reform the vehicle by which to increase student sensitivity to issues of ethnic and cultural diversity. The task force recommended that a Course requirement be established which would ensure that every UW undergraduate

took at least one course related to the four major nonwhite American ethnic groups.

In 1991 the ASUW sent the task force recommendation to the Faculty Senate, requesting that the faculty consider it and amend the graduation requirements accordingly. The Senate is an elected, not necessarily representative body, and its decisions about curricular matters move on for approval by the Board of Regents unless they are overridden by a vote of at least 5% of the total faculty, or about 135 faculty members. The CED issue prompted vigorous debate in the Senate, which ultimately voted down the recommendation. Brought up again in 1993, the proposal was approved by the Senate but overturned by faculty vote.

The Senate then turned the matter over to the Faculty Council on Academic Standards (FCAS), which in 1994 created its own task force "charged with coming to a conclusion as to whether the CED requirement was needed at the UW and whether or not the UW could provide for it." This group surveyed faculty and students and studied reports on the number of students already enrolled in classes that might be considered as fulfilling a CED requirement. In October 1995, they recommended that a five-credit CED requirement be established; that currently available courses be revised to make them suitable for CED credit; and that funding be provided for the development of courses specifically targeted at the CED requirement. In response to earlier criticism, the focus of the CED courses was broadened to cover "how U.S. society and its members influence and are influenced by race and other factors such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, gender and class."

After extensive debate, FCAS passed the recommendation on to the Faculty Senate, but the proposal was never voted on as written. Before bringing the issue up for another vote, the Senate made a significant change in the proposed requirement, substituting "human society" for the focus on "U.S. society." As described by contributing writer Jim Rodriguez in the March 25, 1996 *U.W. Daily*, "Rather than debating the issues of diversity in this country...they reduced the subject of diversity to an 'either/or' debate: either we study diversity in the United States or we study it around the world...When they reduced it to this type of argument and failed to address the issue of diversity in

this country at all, the CED died."

In its new version, the CED requirement lost much of its support among student and faculty. As one professor wrote to the faculty at large, "First, some of you cynically added amendments that have made [the CED requirement] meaningless, and then used that to oppose the requirements. In a self-fulfilling prophesy, the CED is now of marginal usefulness, even as a symbol." Even the Editorial staff of the *Daily*, which in 1995 had called the CED courses "a vital addition to our curriculum," on May 22, 1996 described the CED as "a tired song and dance" that represented "a corrupt attack on the philosophical foundations of the liberal arts education." Once again, the resolution was approved by the Senate but voted down by the faculty at large, in April 1996. In May 1996, the Senate proposed that, "instead of a requirement, each department, school and college would review its curriculum to 'ensure it offers a broad spectrum of courses' that contribute to the learning of diversity." This proposal was quickly endorsed by UW President Richard McCormick, who stated, "It is important to remember that our curriculum already includes a vast number of courses reflecting racial, ethnic and gender diversity."

The Arguments Against The CED Requirement

A number of significant objections to the proposed CED requirement were raised by faculty. Many saw the proposal as politically motivated. One professor reflected the traditional viewpoint of the research-oriented academic when he wrote to the Faculty Senate, "If a university deviates from its mission and succumbs to political pressure, it not only loses its clout and effectiveness as an institution that guarantees freedom of teaching and carrying out research, it may become a dangerous instrument of political, religious or ethnic interest groups." Another worried that passing this requirement might create a dangerous precedent: "we cannot address every social issue through a course requirement," he wrote to the faculty via E-mail.

The requirement was seen by some as "overtly paternalistic," by others as "unduly parochial." Some raised practical objections: at a time when undergraduate requirements were being streamlined

to enhance four-year graduation rates, did it make sense to add a new requirement? Wouldn't new required classes cost too much, demand too much additional classroom space, create difficulties about getting into classes that fit the requirement? Implementation, wrote one professor, "would impose constraints on faculty who do not want to teach required courses." The requirement was objected to by those who felt the curriculum did not need to be changed - "there has been too much going on in the last few years of rewriting perspectives on why certain groups are disadvantaged" - and by those who felt that it did:

> Professor [X] says, "...years of teaching *every subject* from the perspective of white males has created an inability in many of our students even to see the issues that so greatly affect the treatment of those who are not white males." If the faculty want to solve the problem...we should change what and how we already teach.

Interestingly, some of the most vocal opposition came from professors who had no contact with undergraduates and whose own scholarship would have been completely unaffected by the institution of a CED requirement.

Taking a Rational Perspective on the CED Policy Process

How can we begin to understand the events that took place at UW? Most people take a cognitive approach to policy-making, assuming that the policy makers behave in a clear-headed, logical manner, unswayed by irrelevant information or emotions. In other words, they adopt what has been termed a Rational perspective as a basis for analysis (Allison, 1971; Kerr, 1976; Lindblom, 1959).

Specifically, the Rational frame assumes that those working to develop a policy function as a cohesive, unitary group of actors sharing important goals and key values, including reliance on rationality. It assumes that the gathering and interpretation of information guides and is central to the process of policy formulation. The problem is defined through systematic information gathering and data analysis that follow a linear and deliberative process. When the policy-makers have identified the clearly defined substantive problem to be solved, the Rational perspective assumes that the problem can be recognized and agreed upon as a comprehensible whole by the entire group of actors. In

choosing an intervention to solve a problem, policy-makers are assumed to be searching systematically, among many possibilities, for the best solution to the problem, one which has a clear means-end relationship to the goal of the policy formulation.

We could use the Rational frame as a way of explaining the failure to establish a CED policy, or as a means toto understand the successful outcome for those who did not want such a policy, i.e., by viewing no-CED as the successful policy. One could say that since, on the surface, virtually nothing about the process matches the Rational model, anyone adopting a Rational view could easily explain its failure. First, there was no unitary group of actors with shared concerns. Although many at UW were outraged by the incidents, faculty did not see this situation as requiring a response from them. Students instituted a process for curricular reform, thus infringing on the prerogative of the faculty, and assuming that the faculty would see things very much as they did. Thus the two key groups involved in developing the policy had very different concerns; moreover, this fact was not acknowledged by either.

There is no evidence that the development of the CED requirement proposal was based on a systematic process of defining the problem and then choosing from the whole range of possible solutions. How did a small number of offensive racist acts by a few individuals become defined as a problem of generalized cultural and ethnic insensitivity among the undergraduate student body? Could not the problem equally well have been defined as one of on-campus hooliganism, reflecting inadequate security, or of poor admissions criteria that did not screen out students who did not know how to behave in a civilized manner? What made the students decide that a CED requirement was the best possible solution. Certainly this approach meant that those students who had actually engaged in the racist behavior would not be affected. Leaving aside the naivete of assuming that the faculty would simply accede to student demands about changing the curriculum, surely the cumbersome, extremely time-consuming process of developing new curriculum and putting academic requirements in place would have made the CED requirement a less desirable solution, if the process

of choosing a solution had been systematic and based on all available data. The overall process, with all the work being done by ill-informed actors who ultimately did not have decisive power, and with the CED repeatedly sent back to its designers by those who did, does not meet the assumptions of the Rational perspective.

If we look at the CED policy process from the point of view of those faculty who did not want to have a CED requirement, the Rational lens is quite helpful. The key actors, the faculty at large, respond to information which tells them that there is a problem. The substantive problem to be solved is, the students are trying to decide what the curriculum should be. Unlike the students who perceive the racist acts as the problem, the faculty identify the CED proposal itself as the problem. They may differ widely in their reasons for holding this belief, but on this one issue they are unitary, and this is sufficient to conform to the Rational frame. Their intended outcome is the non-establishment of a CED requirement, i.e., preventing the students from interfering in curricular matters, and there is a clear means to this end: vote against it if approved and encourage other faculty to do the same. The superiority of this solution to any other is obvious: it takes almost no effort, requires only a few participants, and stops the process dead in its tracks. The only information the actors need to deal with is the status of the CED proposal at any particular time.

On the whole the Rational perspective seems insufficient to explain this entire policy process. There is more involved here than reasonable people making logical choices based on systematic evaluation of relevant information. There are a lot of feelings around: those of the racist students, those of the students revolted by the incidents, those of the faculty who didn't want to have to teach new courses, those of the faculty who thought the students should mind their own business, those of the faculty who were rather racist themselves, and those of the faculty who saw the CED as the first battle in the war on academic freedom. Perhaps we need an interpretive frame that takes account of differing interests and feelings, as well as of logic and reason.

Adopting an Organizational Process Perspective

A very different kind of focus is achieved with what has been called the Organizational Process lens (Allison, 1971). This perspective views organizations as functioning like organisms. The many aspects of the organism have as their shared reason for being the maintenance of the life and health of the organism, yet each has its own specific tasks and areas of concern; each works together with some other system, but only the brain interacts with every aspect of the organism. When a problem arises, awareness of it may come through sensation or emotion, rather than thought; it is noticed and responded to by some aspects of the organism and ignored by others. The response will be automatic and habitual, something which has worked in the past. If the first response is insufficient to solve the problem, another habitual response will be tried. Only truly unusual situations call for a new response which must be developed through systematic logic and reasoning.

In the policy arena, the Organizational perspective views policy-making as an effort to ensure the stability, even the survival of an organization or one of its parts. It assumes that the subunits of an organization may have different interests, as a result of their differing functions, which lead to a differential evaluation of potential problems. What is a problem for one unit may not be a problem for another or may not be seen as a problem with which that unit is responsible for dealing. This frame assumes that the members of an organization are habit-driven, that their aim is to maintain the ongoing routine as much as possible, through the use of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and organizational customs. The organization gathers only the information it needs to maintain its functions and accomplish its tasks. Problems make themselves known when they disturb the routine, triggering a response from some part of the organization. While the actors will make use of what information is available to them in conceptualizing the problem, they do not seek out definitive information to ensure that the problem is perfectly identified. Neither is the choice of an appropriate response systematic or data-driven, it may be almost automatic. The actors scan their available SOPs for one that looks as if it might solve the problem and put that SOP into action. If that is not

successful, they will try another SOP until they find one that is "good enough" for the job. Because subunits are fragmented and focused on their own needs and procedures, it is possible for one subunit's solution to become the cause of a problem for another subunit, which then must look to its own SOPs for a solution. The one concern that is shared by all subunits is maintaining the viability and stability of the larger organization.

The Organizational Process perspective makes it possible for us to understand how both students and faculty could be working for the benefit of the university while at the same time being in total opposition on the CED issue. One might say that the students perceived the racist incidents as a threat to the survival of the UW as a civil, open-minded, safe educational institution. This perspective assumes that the students would fairly quickly choose a response that would represent an SOP for the ASUW; we might consider that the swift decision to establish the task force represented such an SOP. Alternatively, we might say that, given that it took the task force three years to propose a solution, and that that solution would involve substantial time-consuming effort on the part of another segment of the university, this aspect of the policy formulation process does not fit the frame.

Continuing to employ this lens, we see that, in choosing to pursue the CED as the solution to the problem, the students disturbed the faculty community, who perceived a threat to academic freedom, which they viewed as essential to the survival of the UW and the viability of their own profession. Turning to a solution which had proven effective in the past, the faculty solved this problem by voting down the CED, thus eliminating the threat. They could then return to business as usual, having ensured the university's stability. But no meaningful response would have been made to the racist incidents.

If they had been behaving according to the expectations of the Organizational frame, the students would have responded to the rejection of the CED by coming up with another solution to the original problem, such as a campus-wide rally or a teach-in. Instead, they chose to revise the CED proposal again and again. Although we each revision could be seen as a new solution, one who

adopted an Organizational perspective might also explain the students' lack of success as resulting from their failure to follow a sequential process of trying one different useful solution after another until one was found to take care of the problem.

Neither the Rational nor the Organizational Process perspective is a perfect fit with the events at the UW, but each is useful in explaining at least part of the process. The apparently linear, deliberative, time-consuming process followed by the ASUW task force in arriving at the original CED requirement is more consistent with the Rational model, as is the repeated revision of the proposal based on new information about the faculty response. The Organizational model does a better job of explaining the behavior of the faculty. A problem was perceived and a solution natural to the faculty was quickly chosen; the threat to the organization/UW was eliminated. The action followed a stimulus-response model, requiring no information-gathering.

These perspectives still leave us puzzling over the ASUW task force's decision to propose, and stick with, a CED requirement as a solution to the problem. When the racist incidents occurred, feelings ran high on campus. We might have expected the task force to propose something that was more immediately responsive and controlled by students. Why did the task force deliberate for so long? Why did they choose action by the faculty as the proper solution? Perhaps something more is implicated here, that neither the Rational nor the Organizational perspectives have focused on.

Suppose we were to assume that the actions of everyone involved in the CED policy process were related to values - preserving, defending, or affirming values. What has been called the Normative perspective makes this assumption (Malen & Knapp, 1994). From this perspective, problems are defined in terms of *value tensions* - whatever they may look like on the surface, problems actually arise when an important value is challenged or threatened or when differing values come into conflict. The same situation can be a problem for one part of an organization and not for another, depending upon whether a value tension is perceived. In such a situation, the actors are no longer just students or faculty but *value promoters*, whether consciously or not. They seek out information

primarily about others' values and about how various policy actions might impact their own values. The Normative frame does not imply expectations about the nature of the policy-making process, beyond assuming that whatever process is followed actually embodies the expression, interaction and exchange of deeply held values. The overarching assumption is that it is values that drive policy action, which in turn impacts values. Policies are actually expressions of values.

A Normative View of the CED Policy Process

Adopting a Normative perspective, we would ask ourselves, not what relevant information or SOP's led the students to propose the CED requirement, but rather, what values are embodied in the policy action they chose. What values were threatened by the racist acts on campus and became the impetus for action? What values are promoted by a CED requirement? What values held by members of the faculty were either promoted or threatened by the CED requirement? What are the consequences in terms of values of the final outcome? The Normative perspective is both simpler and far more complex than the Rational and Organizational.

Given the infinite number of values that can be reflected in social behavior, in the absence of direct information we can only guess at the values implicated in the students' choice of action. We might narrow the field somewhat by focusing on dimensions of value frequently addressed in the literature on education policy, such as quality, equity, efficiency, and liberty. A high quality education cannot be gained in an atmosphere that threatens students' sense of safety and belonging (equity) or the free expression of a wide range of perhaps controversial ideas (liberty) about the nature of different cultures. Thus one might say that these incidents created conditions on campus which were experienced by students as manifestations of serious value tensions that needed to be resolved.

The Normative perspective also has explanatory value in looking at the particular policy mechanism that was chosen. What are the characteristics of the CED requirement proposal? It involves an institutionalized response, requires participation by the faculty, seeks to change the educational environment in substantive ways, entails substantial effort and future cooperation between

faculty and students, and will affect UW students for years to come. What do these characteristics tell us about the underlying values?

Clearly the students were seeking more than just a change in the behavior of the actual perpetrators and were thinking beyond their own relatively brief individual experience at UW. The values that were threatened apparently relate to both the functioning of the university as an institution and the nature of a university education. We might guess that the desired state threatened by the incidents is one of UW as an institution that welcomes students regardless of their cultural background, teaches and expects of them civil discourse, prepares them to function in the outside world in a similar manner, and is willing to let them learn what there is to be learned. Perhaps the value could be stated as "openness."

Using the Normative frame, we would expect the students to propose a policy mechanism that seemed most likely to promote this value. The CED requirement, burdensome though it might seem for faculty and students alike, could be the best instrument if it were the one that students saw as most likely to be effective in protecting openness and civil discourse at UW. The students must also have assumed that these values were shared by and important to the faculty as well. In this assumption they may well have been correct; after the CED was originally voted down, the FCAS task force proposed a similar requirement. But value tensions arise not merely when a particular value is threatened, but also when values are in conflict, where the promotion of one may affect another. Looking back to the faculty E-mail exchanges [see pp. 4-5], we find the expression of several values: *liberty*, embodied in freedom of teaching (or not teaching) and carrying out research; *quality*, involved in preservation of the canon and maintaining substantial major requirements; *independence*, in not becoming "an instrument of...interest groups," and *efficiency*, in terms of conservation of resources and enhancing four-year graduation rates. Of all of these, liberty appears to be the value which arouses the greatest passion. We also see evidence that some feel the students have misidentified the best solution; to quote again, "If the faculty want to solve the problem...we should change

what and how we already teach."

It is clear from the faculty's actions that the values they felt were threatened by the CED proposal were much stronger or of more central importance to them than the value previously labeled "openness." The faculty's actions to water down and then to vote down the CED requirement may be seen as representing their attempt to preserve a desired state of academic freedom. The actual nature of those actions would not be of concern from the Normative perspective. When the University President finally stepped into the controversy, it was to side with the status quo - that is, to require action by the faculty that would not be a threat to the values they had championed and that would leave them in control of the future process.

The Normative perspective is very effective in explicating the events at the University of Washington. It brings depth to our understanding and can account meaningfully for all those aspects of policy making which it addresses. Yet saying the students chose to propose a CED requirement because it seemed the best way to promote and protect the value of openness seems insufficiently comprehensive. How did they arrive at that particular solution? What made them think that it was in fact the best solution? The Normative lens does not help us see the answers to these questions. We want to know more about what these people were doing. Despite its concern with deeply held values, the Normative perspective seems strangely impersonal; the humanity of the policy making process is left out.

Explaining What Happened at the University of Washington

Reviewing what we have learned, we must say that, while each of the frames contribute to our understanding, none of them by itself offers sufficient explanatory power. The Normative perspective provides the best overall fit, explaining the behavior of the different actors in terms of the values that underlie that behavior, but it leaves many questions unanswered, questions the other perspectives do address.

The lengthy process that resulted in the original CED proposal could well be explained by the

Rational perspective, which assumes a linear, deliberative process of gathering and processing information in order to arrive at the best possible solution - although this frame does not help us to understand why the CED requirement would be seen as the best solution. The Rational lens also helps us to see the repeated revision of the proposal as an attempt to use new information to improve the solution. Finally, this perspective can give us a reasonable explanation of the behavior of the faculty - but not if we try to use it to explain the behavior of the students at the same time.

What the Organizational perspective offers us is a way of viewing the CED policy process in terms of the university as an entity, rather than explaining either the behavior of the students or the actions of the faculty. Using the Organizational lens, we are able to perceive UW as a place with many different divisions which may have very different, perhaps competing or even incompatible needs, and which therefore see potential problems differently. We can see how the behavior of one division (the students) might become a problem for another division (the faculty). Most significantly, we can appreciate how these competing interests, one trying to defeat the efforts of the other, could nevertheless each be certain it was acting in the best interest of the university.

Taken together, these three perspectives substantially illuminate a very complex series of events. By integrating these frames, we might draw the following conclusions about the CED policy case. The racist acts at UW alarmed the students, because they threatened a central value we have labeled "openness." Feeling impelled to deal with this threat to the university, the ASUW established a task force, an SOP for them. This group then embarked upon a lengthy information- gathering and deliberative process intended to determine the most effective means to eliminate the threat. The result was a proposal for new course requirements for graduation of future students. When this proposal was presented to the faculty, they also perceived a threat to key values - but the threat lay, not in the racist incidents, but in the students' proposal. In order to eliminate this threat to the university, the faculty had no need to resort to gathering information and considering alternative actions. The organization of the university made it possible for only a small percentage of the faculty to defeat the

proposal by repeatedly voting against it. The ultimate withdrawal of the CED proposal after its third defeat meant that the faculty were successful in defending and protecting their values. The value the students had tried to promote may still remain threatened, but the students originally involved graduated long ago, the incidents have faded from memory, and the present student body no longer seems to recognize these issues as a problem for them or for the university.

Some Concluding Thoughts

This exploration of the UW CED policy case demonstrates the increased interpretive power gained when we use several different lenses to look at the process of policy making in education. It is also apparent that which perspectives are chosen is critical to how comprehensive and effective our analysis will be. We are still left to wonder about that CED requirement. Perhaps another of the myriad of possible interpretive lenses we might have chosen could solve that one (Malen & Knapp, 199). However, just as the lens determines what we can learn through our analysis, so the perspective of the analyst is likely to determine which interpretive frames he chooses to use. We cannot assume that adopting more than one explanatory perspective will enhance our understanding of policy making, if those perspectives are essentially the lenses we would have used anyway in interpreting events. Rather, we should commit ourselves to choosing those perspectives which seem to best match the situation - and then choose at least one that feels alien to our natural way of looking at the world.

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